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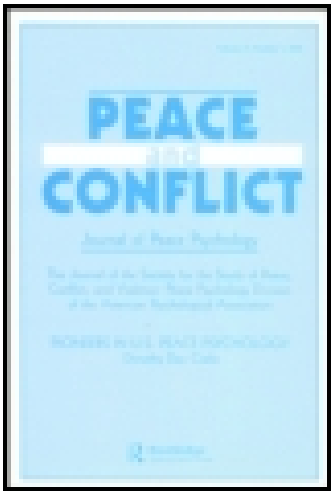

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# Organizational Supports for Abusive Interrogations in the "War on Terror"

Jean Maria Arrigo [a] & Ray Bennett [b]
[a] Project on Ethics and Art in Testimony
[b] Washington, DC
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# Organizational Supports for Abusive Interrogations in the "War on Terror"

Jean Maria Arrigo
*Project on Ethics and Art in Testimony*

Ray Bennett
*Washington, DC*

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This article addresses the following conundrum: *How* do abusive interrogations persist in the "War on Terror" over the practical objections of senior interrogators? Although the behavior of interrogator and interrogatee and the conditions of detention occupy the limelight in public controversies, every defense-related interrogation is deeply embedded in a web of organizational precedents and procedures. This article examines three major elements, providing organizational and psychological insights: (a) interrogation experts are positioned too low in the military hierarchy to govern interrogation protocols; (b) with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, sudden demand for interrogators exceeded the supply, resulting in low standards for selection, training, and placement of new interrogators; and (c) political and military authorities have promoted unwarranted exemptions to successful non-abusive interrogation protocols.

We address the following conundrum: *How* do abusive interrogations persist in the "War on Terror" over the practical objections of senior interrogators? Although the behavior of interrogator and interrogatee and the conditions of detention occupy the limelight in public controversies, every defense-related interrogation is deeply embedded in a web of organizational precedents and procedures. Decades of social psychological research have confirmed the power of organizational process generally to prevail over individual autonomy and shape behavior, and thus to set the stage for the potential use of abusive techniques in interrogation.

To illuminate the web of precedents and procedures that support abusive interrogations, we examine three major organizational factors:

Correspondence should be addressed to Jean Maria Arrigo, 110 Oxford St., Irvine, CA 92512. E-mail: jmarrigo@cox.net

1. Interrogation experts are positioned too low in the military hierarchy to govern interrogation protocols.
2. With the invasion of Iraq in 2003, sudden demand for interrogators exceeded the supply, resulting in low standards for selection, training, and placement of new interrogators.
3. Political and military authorities have created, encouraged, and tolerated unwarranted exemptions to successful non-abusive interrogation protocols (see Moghaddam, this issue, for political motives).

Unreferenced assertions derive from presentations by four retired, senior U.S. Army interrogators, including Ray Bennett, who attended the November 10 through 12, 2006, seminar on Rethinking the Psychology of Torture, held at Georgetown University, Washington, DC (Arrigo, 2007).

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## THE POSITION OF INTERROGATION EXPERTS IN THE MILITARY HIERARCHY

Interrogation has traditionally been the responsibility of the U.S. Army, rather than the Navy or Air Force, because the Army holds the great majority of prisoners of war. The Army hierarchy descends from the general officer ranks (general, colonel, major, captain, lieutenant) to warrant officers to the enlisted ranks (sergeant, corporal, private). A warrant officer is an advanced technical specialist, such as a helicopter pilot or the supervisory mechanic in a motor pool. Until the early 1980s, Army interrogation officers could rise to the rank of colonel. Then, interrogation officers were reassigned as military intelligence generalists. There remained two occupational specialties for Army interrogators: 96C (now 97E) for enlisted personnel and 351E (now 351H) for warrant officers. (The Marine Corps, which functions as the infantry for the Navy and therefore holds prisoners, has equivalent occupational specialties for interrogators.) Army officers could pursue a career track in human intelligence (HUMINT), but received only a formal introduction to interrogation with no practical application.

### Marginalization of Interrogators

As a result of the strict military hierarchy and relegation of interrogators to lower ranks, officers who make strategic or tactical decisions concerning interrogations rarely have any knowledge of interrogation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff has high-level advisors for infantry, artillery, aviation, and so on, but no such advisors for interrogation. At present, many military and civilian authorities deliberate from an uninformed folk psychological belief in the efficacy of torture interrogation (elucidated by Janoff-Bulman, this issue). In a 2005 professional ethics survey of

HUMINT collectors at the rank of sergeant, conducted by Rebecca Bolton at the Joint Military Intelligence College, respondents spontaneously remarked on the problem of authorities' ignorance of interrogation (Bolton, 2007):

> Col. XXXXX was allowed to do such [torture] in XXXXX, and look what happened there. Just follow the pattern. Ignorant people using their rank to do what they want leads to problems. And for some reason, because they do things that average people consider "interrogations," real interrogators are raked over the coals for it. (p. 152)

One of the seminar interrogators added (W. Martin, personal communication, June 24, 2007):

> In 1987, the two-hour Interrogation Asset Overview class in the Counterintelligence Officers Track Course was deleted because they thought they did not need it. Reason given was they had already received a four-hour platform presentation class on interrogation and did not need any further classes. I unsuccessfully argued that not only should it not be deleted but should be lengthened. My reasoning was that ... I did not need an ignorant boss who could not effectively employ or represent our discipline. The rest is history.

The problems presented by the disconnection between rank and expertise can be understood in terms of French and Raven's (1960) theory of social power. The *expert power* of trained and experienced interrogators is profoundly subordinate to the *legitimate power,* signified by rank, of their superior officers, who also wield considerable *reward power* through favorable assessments and assignments and *punishment power* through court martial and unfavorable assessments and assignments.

The history of the U.S. military chaplaincy illustrates the significance of rank in a specialty based on cooperative human relationships rather than authority. Chaplains were not able to perform their mission effectively in the military until they were granted officer ranks by Congress and unified under a Chief of Chaplains (Budd, 2002). In the strict hierarchy of military command, only legitimate power in the form of officer rank would enable senior interrogators to prevail with their expertise on interrogation strategy and protocol.

## Expert Interrogators in Short Supply

In the late 1980s, the Department of Defense deemphasized and reduced HUMINT collection (such as espionage, interrogation, and debriefing) in favor of imagery intelligence (such as satellite photography) and signals intelligence collection (such as interception of communications). Development and deployment of the large weapons systems characteristic of the Cold War left traces in mining, manu-

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facture, transport, and communications, which modern imagery and signals intelligence could detect. In the perennial competition for prestige and funding, interrogators and linguists were reassigned, released, or simply not replaced. Terrorist activities, however, are much less detectible by technical methods. The lapse of HUMINT systems has put heavy demands on interrogation as a collection method.

At the peak of HUMINT, in the early 1980s, there were about 1,100 Army interrogators. Fifteen to 20 interrogators would be assigned to an Army division of 14,000 soldiers, in accord with the Army Military Intelligence Structure established in World War II. The role of the interrogators was to provide "24/7" service in screening and interrogating detainees and in reviewing and translating intercepted documents.

Revision of the Army Military Intelligence Structure to reduce costs in 1984 resulted in assignment of a single five-member "interrogation team" to a heavy (i.e., armored and motorized) division, decreasing the number of active duty interrogators to about 525. Although interrogation is usually conducted as an individual rather than a team task, the "new team" was equipped with one jeep, one radio, and one tent, which thwarted simultaneous work at separate sites. Yet, interrogation at separate sites is essential. Commanders of smaller units require immediate tactical intelligence from captives, such as location of enemy mines and combat strength; commanders of larger units often require strategic intelligence, such as identification of the political allies of the enemy. The budgetary restructuring, therefore, compromised the intelligence mission even beyond the cut in personnel. The protests of senior interrogators were disregarded due to their low ranks (W. Martin, personal communication, June 24, 2007).

## Inadequate Training of Interrogators

Currently, there is one Army interrogation training program, at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. The Marines initiated their own interrogation training program in Dam Neck, Virginia, around 1988. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has no acknowledged training program, and the public record of their interrogations suggests to senior Army interrogators there is no formal CIA training as understood by military interrogators.

Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, almost 1,000 soldiers per year have passed through the 16-week Army HUMINT course at the Fort Huachuca U.S. Army Intelligence Center and School. To keep the military force structure "slim," as envisioned by the civilian leadership of the military, the Army has combined interrogation and counterintelligence in one military occupational specialty, Human Intelligence Collector (HIC; 97E). The current Army goal is 3,000 soldiers in this combined specialty.

How adequate is the training provided for new military interrogators? The training schedule shown in Table 1 indicates the wide range of skills required of these

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TABLE 1
Fort Huachuca Schedule of Training
for Human Intelligence Specialties, 2006

| *No. of Weeks* | *Description* |
|---|---|
| 1 | Administrative/initial entry training, including military customs and courtesy, rape and suicide prevention, and so forth. |
| 1 | Elicitation techniques, rapport building, interrogation approaches. |
| 2 | Techniques of questioning. |
| 1 | Map reading and land navigation. |
| 1 | General military topics (e.g., how a tank works). |
| 1 | Intelligence topics including cultural awareness, geography, Geneva Convention, FM27–10 Law of Land Warfare, and Standard North Atlantic Treaty Organization Agreement 2033/2044. |
| 1 | Planning and preparation: approval of novice's interrogation plan by a superior, consultation with a behavioral science expert, medical clearance of source, legal review of the interrogation plan, and approval by a lieutenant colonel or colonel in the interrogator's chain of command. |
| 2 | Report writing. |
| 4 | Military source operations including debriefing for liaison duties, document exploitation, liaison with allies, and establishment of cooperative security relationships with authorities in villages, refugee camps, or nongovernmental organizations. |
| 2 | Final training exercise in the field on "patrols" and screening of sources. |

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personnel, the short time period for mastery of skills, the proportion of the training specifically devoted to interrogation, and the safeguards on performance. The typical student is a 19-year-old high school graduate with little military experience beyond basic training.

## Lowered Standards for Interrogators

Contrast the training program outlined in Table 1 with prior training. In the late 1980s, aspiring interrogators were selected for intelligence and language ability, with above-average scores on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery and a passing score on the Defense Language Aptitude Battery. Recent Fort Huachuca instructors have noticed a drop in the quality of incoming students, exacerbated by a policy of graduating almost all. In 1984, the drop-out/flush-out rate from interrogation training was 30% to 50%; now it is around 5%. Formerly, graduates were supervised and mentored for several years by senior interrogators. Modeling themselves on their mentors, they would develop the self-mastery and situational awareness so crucial to successful interrogation. Now, graduates may be placed as interrogators without regard to their course performance and without supervision by senior interrogators. (This contrasts with the 1,200 hours of supervised work of

newly graduated psychotherapists.) Although the novice interrogator always risked the possibility of face-to-face confrontation with the equivalent of a 40-year-old *jihadist,* now he typically lacks the assistance of senior interrogators.

Junior interrogators need mentors for dealing with their superior officers as well as for dealing with savvy interrogatees. Another respondent to Bolton's (2007) professional ethics survey of U.S. Army interrogators gave this example:

> HICs are trained very well in doing our job. HICs are not trained in telling senior commanders, "no." Worse, senior commanders do not fully comprehend our job. They don't need to fully understand it, they do however, need to accept the fact that we provide "X" to them. That is all. When they want "Y," they need to understand that they are not going to get it. Only "X." (p. 145)

The former language requirement for interrogators (97E Qualified Personnel) has been suspended indefinitely on the premise that interrogators will operate with interpreters. Only after attaining an E5 or E6 rank (corresponding to about 3–4 and 5–7 years of service, respectively) does language school now become an *option* for interrogators. The language requirement had also served as the only screening tool for the psychological make-up of aspiring interrogators. The language school exposed the trainee to another culture in a learning environment before exposure in an interrogation situation.

Successful interrogators tend to be open-minded, tolerant, imaginative, curious, and unregimented. These qualities are at odds with traditional military doctrine, discipline, and criteria for promotion. Trainers find that bright, conscientious recruits who are introverts or mentally rigid do not become successful interrogators. They should be assigned instead to technical intelligence collection, but there is no provision for such differentiation by individual traits. Trainers seek extroverts with a cognitive style that psychologists have named *conceptual/integrative complexity*; that is, the ability to differentiate and integrate conflicting perspectives in an overarching framework (Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992). Interrogators should be able to accommodate the worldview of a hostile detainee from a foreign culture and interact meaningfully, which presumes maturity.

Most new graduates are "underage," so to speak. A seminar interrogator and trainer remarked, "The Army is training people too young. At 19, their hormones are still raging. The Army should train somebody 30 to 35 years old. The Army's measure of a soldier is physical fitness, shoe shining …." This comment is supported by lifespan studies of the development of the prefrontal cortex that show continuing gains in executive function, impulse control, and psychosocial skills, such as resistance to peer pressure, through adolescence and into the mid-20s (Steinberg, 2007). Indeed, young, inexperienced, and unsupervised interrogators are most likely to turn to the fear-up approach; it is by now textbook knowledge that "[a]fter people reach age 25, their testosterone levels and rates of violent crime

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decrease together" (Myers, 2007, p. 273). By different methods, senior interrogators and neuropsychologists reached essentially the same conclusion about the appropriate minimum age for interrogators, not 19 or 20 but around 30.

From a military perspective, the training of interrogators is "manpower intensive" in both execution and maintenance. Techniques of questioning and language fluency are very perishable and demand frequent practice. Furthermore, practice removes soldiers from military training. Commanders, however, have to exhibit quantifiable successes, so they are apt to send an interrogator to the motor pool to work on trucks instead of to language school. Both tasks are quantifiable, but vehicle repair is cheaper and language acquisition is a "personal" improvement that does not benefit the unit once the soldier leaves it. A seminar interrogation trainer remarked, "Fort Huachuca is not mission-oriented but bureaucratic. We don't need numbers of interrogators; we need quality …."

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### Lowered Standards for Interrogation Trainers and Supervisors

There are about 120 instructors at Fort Huachuca, of whom about 95% are contractors, some with little military experience. The instructors typically have 4 to 8 years of interrogation experience, which senior interrogators consider minimally adequate. Because of the rapid operational tempo for current military interrogators, many have gained experience well beyond older interrogators. However, the rapid tempo can create "false experience due to poor mentorship and bad habits in the [interrogation] booth" (J. DuForest, personal communication, June 24, 2007). The earlier cutbacks on HUMINT severely diminished the pool of senior interrogators available for training new interrogators, and mandatory retirement dates for those who remained contribute to the shortage.

Another source of poor supervision has been the forced transfer of warrant officers into HUMINT from unrelated fields. They attend the basic training course in interrogation and then command lower ranking interrogators who may have much more experience. In the worst case, warrant officers with meager interrogation experience are put in charge of newly graduated interrogators—"a recipe for disaster waiting to happen," said one of the seminar interrogators, especially "when demand for information is high from a senior officer" (W. Martin, personal communication, July 11, 2007).

### Bureaucratic Dysfunction and Mission

There is nothing sinister in the preceding list of organizational obstacles to the training, deployment, and supervision of competent interrogators. Indeed, classical sociological theory describes such "bureaucratic dysfunctions" as virtually inevitable in the quest for "precision, reliability, and efficiency" (Merton, 1949, p.

154). Centralized control overrides local needs and expertise, adherence to rules substitutes for achievement of organizational goals, the organization loses its capacity to adapt to reality, and so on. What *do* merit attention are the need for specific changes and the resistance of bureaucracies to interventions. Any realistic commitment by policymakers to productive, non-abusive interrogations must entail appropriate selection, training, mentorship, and deployment of interrogators.

## UNWARRANTED EXEMPTIONS TO INTERROGATION PROTOCOLS

Interrogation occurs in *tactical environments* such as tents, Humvees, and the holding areas of small field units, and in *strategic environments* such as fixed detention centers distant from combat areas. In either case, the Geneva Conventions, the U.S. Law of Land Warfare, *and* successful protocols for hostile interrogations all forbid abusive interrogations for collection of intelligence.

In tactical environments, field units should defer to trained interrogators for dispassionate intelligence collection from captives. The combat readiness and high emotions of field units work against rapport with their captives. Yet, there are many combatants who nevertheless perform or influence interrogations. A combat commander who does not know intelligence practices, much less interrogation, cannot be overruled by a 19-year-old enlisted interrogator assigned to his unit. Another respondent to Bolton's (2006) survey gave this example:

> [I was ordered to] leave a 20-year-old [interrogation] specialist with a unit commander that did not listen to the young HUMINTer's advice and allowed the abuse of prisoners under his command. (p. 6)

Special Operations Forces—Army Rangers, Navy Seals, Army Special Forces (Green Berets), and the Army counterterrorist Delta Force—are trained for self-confidence and aggression. In a high-adrenaline raid of a terrorist safe house, the direct interrogation approach of Special Forces may be to kick the captive in the head and then ask his name. Cognitive psychologists have explored the difficulties in sudden switching of tasks under stress. Because stress depletes cognitive resources, simplified models are used for the new task (Steinhauser, Maier, & Hübner, 2007). Special Forces are graduates of the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center and School Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape training program. There they experienced capture by torturers so as to practice counter-interrogation techniques. Water boarding, prolonged sleep deprivation, and other physical and psychological tortures, therefore, commonly constitute their model of interrogation, which is entirely expected under social modeling theory (Bandura, 1973). As isolated and insulated units, Special Forces are quite secretive; so much of "what

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happens there stays there" (in military jargon). Interrogation norms not brought to bear at point of capture or in initial holding facilities may go unreported.

In strategic environments, contract interrogators—often former counter-intelligence practitioners with 4 hours of interrogation training—and military police—often with training only in criminal interrogation—may easily succumb to the folly of the fear-up approach. Army interrogators who halt abuse of captives in U.S. military facilities may not be invited back.

The CIA, which operates in many contexts, has created the most serious violations of non-abusive interrogation protocols through the Presidential Signing Statement that allows the executive branch to exempt them from torture restrictions under the Detainee Treatment Act of 2005. Trained Army interrogators have mentioned CIA interrogators taking over their interrogatees in other countries, abusing the interrogatees and getting no information, then returning them to the Army interrogators who obtain useable information. CIA officials have also asked malleable young Army interrogators and contract interrogators to carry out abusive procedures and then abandoned them to face the consequences alone.

Combat commanders are, in effect, exempt from antitorture legislation because there is an understanding under the current U.S. administration that they will not be prosecuted. Current permissiveness toward abusive interrogation has offered opportunities for advancement and self-aggrandizement to personnel deficient in one of the most basic military virtues, *competence* (Shay, 2002, p. 224), as well as in the traditional military virtues of self-discipline, respect, and honor. Thus, many problems of unwarranted exemptions to legitimate and effective interrogation protocols arise. (For comparison, psychologists might envision the problems that would arise from untrained persons acting in the roles of clinicians or school psychologists.)

## CONCLUSION

We opened with this question: *How* do abusive interrogations persist in the "War on Terror" over the practical objections of senior interrogators? Despite the popular image of the grandiose interrogator with power of life and death over the interrogatee, senior U.S. Army interrogators occupying relatively low positions in a starkly hierarchical organization are easily overridden by their superiors' ignorance of interrogation protocols, folk beliefs in the efficacy of torture interrogation, retaliatory attitudes toward suspected enemies, political opportunism, or obedience to yet higher authorities. The reduction of HUMINT personnel in the mid-1980s, the sudden high demand for interrogators in 2001 without a corresponding commitment of resources, and the failure of the military to adapt structure to task in preparing interrogators, have resulted in a scarcity of competent in-

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terrogators. Further, implicit and explicit interrogation policies under the current administration have created exemptions to U.S. Army interrogation protocols.

Organizational researchers question the capacity of complex organizations to function as responsible agents. The heart of the matter is "the problem of many hands": So many functionaries at different levels of hierarchy contribute to organizational outcomes in different ways that it is difficult to trace responsibility (Bovens, 1998). Long chains of small administrative and technical steps between policy and execution may mask the meaning of action for the functionaries themselves. Technical language, such as "sensory deprivation," and outright euphemisms, such as "softening up the detainee," also obscure meaning (Adams & Balfour, 1998). In national security settings, secrecy obviously exacerbates the problem of tracing causal relations and responsibility.

Many reasons have been advanced for the elimination of abusive interrogations: to improve intelligence collection, to uphold military ethics, to protect allied soldiers from torture upon capture, to comply with international law, to maintain moral legitimacy as a nation, and to protect the human rights of detainees. In practice, the elimination would require not only a policy change but attenuation of the organizational supports for abusive interrogation and the creation of new organizational supports for non-abusive interrogation.

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